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R·I·T

**1:38**

by

Yuhao Sheng

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Art in  
Film Production

School/Department of Film and Animation

College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

August 12, 2021

Approval committee:

Frank Deese

Brain Price

Dan LaTourette

## **Abstract:**

This thesis support paper demonstrated the entire process of creating this thesis film "1:38," describing how this film completed from a simple inspiration to a finished film project. Besides, this paper also describes how the author's ideas formed from the beginning and his inner struggle during the quarantine period, which inspired the author to create this film. Thirdly, this paper clarifies how the whole film team worked and our considerations about different problems during the film shooting.

I believe this paper would be a good reference for the students to shoot their film with a low budget.

## **Introduction:**

With the last "wrap" called out from my mouth, I realized my three-year overseas graduate study was wrapped as well. I felt it was unreal when I was cleaning up everything on the set. During the cleaning, everything in these three years went through my mind quickly. Furthermore, I could feel how my ideas and inspiration were embodied in the real world. Seeing the hard disk on the table, I realized my three years are right there in that disk. This thesis film represents all I learned at RIT. During my days at RIT, there was nervousness, mistakes, and me being unconfident in the shooting. Nevertheless, the shooting also made me feel fun and joyful.

To be honest, I was a little anxious when I came to RIT because it was the first time in my life that I could immerse myself in a totally different culture for such a long time and learn utterly new things different from what I knew before. I was nervous about what will be happened in the future. Even though I chose a major related to my undergraduate education, I still felt everything was unknown to me.

A majority of courses I took during my undergraduate period are technique-related. During the undergrad period, I always worked as a Digital Image Technician (DIT) on the set. My job was to manage film footage on the laptop or helping others to solve equipment problems. Seeing other crew members exploring creative careers, I was eager to take some filmmaking foundation courses, such as creating story and blocking actors. Therefore, I decided to pursue my graduate study in America for the comprehensive filmmaking system and flexible curriculum. I was curious about what was the whole process of producing a film. How can I get film creation inspiration? And I noticed that all these things I was seeking were in the School of Film and Animation at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York.

The biggest challenge for me was storytelling, which was my most significant weak point. Whenever I wrote an article or a story, I felt a blankness in my brain, even in Chinese, let alone in English, a foreign language to me. My screenwriting professor Frank Deese provided plenty of help; his scriptwriting class was the most helpful class for me. In the course, I learned how to organize the story and make the story attractive enough. I read scripts and watched many films to

store some content in my mind. Because I know that the more information I have in my brain, the better story I can create. At the same time, I also like to learn from existing artwork. In my three-year creative experience, many of my inspirations are inspired by masterpieces I have enjoyed. Also, I can experience differences between the eastern and western cultures. Many things I feel are commonplace in China are rare in the United States. But, when I present Chinese ideas to a Western point of view, people feel confused. When, I wrote the script of my first film "The Couple," I was stressed out because of these cultural differences. I felt intense self-doubt about whether I could write a complete story by myself.

Many people like to create the story based on their life experiences. That is quite correct. However, a story based on my own life experience is not that easy for me. One reason is that I don't think I have life experiences that are fascinating enough to support my story; and another reason is that I feel I can express myself very well. At that time, I was a little obsessed with a Japanese TV series called "Yonimo kimyô na monogatari." These short stories always are horror stories and science fiction stories. I enjoy watching people presenting supernatural matters on the TV as daily life. These

kinds of stories make me willing to believe the stories are the truth. I want to bring this experience to other people. After consideration, I decided that for a student like me to tell a story with such feeling, the most suitable and the most accessible genre is the light science fiction story.

Due to this reason, in my graduate study, I always like to write some light science fiction stories. In the spring semester of my second year, I started to conceive the story of my thesis film. It could be a bizarre, coincidental, and ridiculous story. In my mind, film provides an ideal platform which allows people to play with time. And many films love to play with time. My favorite is "Inception," directed by Christopher Nolan.

## **The Proposal:**

At first, I drafted two ideas. COVID-19 was just spreading through China, and many touching events happened, which moves me a lot. So, I want to write a story about COVID. But when I finished the treatment, I could not say I liked the story very much. I didn't think I could present the best story because I didn't experience those events by myself. I asked Daniel

LaTourette, the instructor of the thesis preparation class. I told him that I had two ideas, one is a story based on some actual events in China, but I could not say I liked it. The other was a rough idea. I was unsure whether I could write it well, but I was interested in that idea. He suggested I write the story I like because I will have the motivation to write the story I want. The basic of this story takes place in a time loop. I was interested in this theme, but I didn't have a good design for the story.

One day, when I was browsing on the Internet and clicking on links aimlessly, I suddenly saw the light. A short film jumped into my eyes but presented like a video log. The story told about a Japanese YouTuber who is sightseeing in Atami. She gets trapped in a time loop and tries to escape from that. A smartphone shot the whole movie, and all the shots are from a selfie angle, which makes audiences feel they are participating in the entire event. This film became a good reference for my thesis film.

In my opinion, the film is an ideal form to make some abstract ideas come to concretization. Also, the film is a tool to reveal to the world an auteur's mind to audiences. From my personal experiences, film gives me a method to play



with time, which we can't do in everyday life. Based on these principles, I created a time loop story.

2020 was a challenging year, especially during the spring. During the epidemic situation, everyone was not recommended to leave their home. From the spring break, every day I wake up, I feel like the same day. At first, this feels not bad. Several days later, I'm tired of repeat the same thing every day. I tried to do something special to do in the following days. Finally, I decided to learn something I never tried before. (I taught myself the Japanese language.) After that, I felt better in this situation. Suddenly I realized that my psychological changes could be used in this time loop story, from feeling fresh to impatient, trying to change, and finally having success breaking the repetition. I think making changes is very important in our life. When I feel everything is getting boring and repeating, I'd like to make a change and find something new to add pleasure to life.

I believe the time loop is a good story to convey repetition - simple, but worth it for people to start deep thinking. I simply chose to use a thief as the. I watched a lot of Japanese films at that time. The most attractive one was called "Shoplifters." The basic structure of the story

merged in my mind quickly. A thief is an order destroyer, which is the ideal figure to break everyday life. They break the rules by their behaviors, which allows them to put themselves into a time loop. I set the pocket watch as the critical item because the watch is the best symbol of time in our daily life, and I can give this watch a magical power to put the protagonist into the loop. In this story, the whole world is running on a track. If something unexpected happened, the world would be disordered. So, the loop occurred. When I got this idea, I made a phone call to my friend to illustrate this story. He was very interested in this story, and we had a long conversation about it.

One of the most significant parts of the film was how to write the story when Cheng Hao tries to prove he is in the loop to his friend Bo, and make it attractive, convincing, and easy to shoot. At first, I drew up a rough idea of this part of the story. I wanted my protagonist to prove this by predicting some accidents. I wanted some merchandise dropped from the shelf through a series of accidents. Like the Rube Goldberg machine, at last, everything is messed up in the shop. When Cheng Hao comes to the shop again, accidents happen again, but he can figure out what will happen next, so he

tries his best to prevent the merchandise from falling from the shelf. But he fails.

The inventories still fall from the frame. And when the third time Cheng Hao comes to the shop, he can remember every accident in the shop and prevents the falling. This plot looks exciting and convincing enough. But when I look back on the reality, it will cost much money on the production design and the location. The accidents in this plot are hard to design as one single chain reaction and shooting this part would be highly time-consuming. Considered the cost constraint, we had to abandon this idea and work out another unanticipated event that could be convincing and engaging enough at the same time. This question was surrounding my mind for a long time. Then, I went out to a convenience store, and I noticed the lottery in the store. Suddenly, I think I got the answer. The lottery is an ideal item to illustrate the loop, which conformed to all I needed. When I came back from the store, I told this idea to my friend. He thought that is the best alternative solution as well. We talked a lot about this film, the location, and the crew in the scene settings. Everything seemed to get confirmed that night.

Although I had a relatively complete plan for my thesis film, I was still a little nervous about the thesis proposal. I was not sure what the committee would think about the story. On the proposal day, everything went very well, committee members brought out some questions about the story, and I gave them the answer. My proposal passed successfully. But there still were some questions left in the story: what was the protagonist's motive to return the pocket watch and how to make this story bizarre enough.

## **Script:**

The biggest problem in scriptwriting is the language problem. Because I decided to shoot my thesis film in China, I needed to write my script in two languages: one for my thesis advisor and for subtitles and another version for my Chinese crew and actors. Because of that, I found there were so many problems when I was writing the dialogue. To improve my language, I watched many movies to learn native expressions and find some interesting slang. But I still found words in Chinese with no corresponding words in English, and vice versa. To make the meaning of the lines the same, I made many

changes to the dialogue to make sure the definitions in the two versions are close and interesting. Also, they have the same function of pushing the plot forward, and as metaphor and subtext.

Except for the language problem, I still needed to clarify Cheng Hao's motivation for escaping from the loop. I had long communication with my advisor and my committee members to make sure the reason for his escaping. Finally, I decided to let him feel the helplessness and loneliness in this time loop. I think his being mentally frustrated is the best reason for his desire to escape from the time loop.

After I finished my first draft, Frank Deese and I had a meeting to talk about the script. The biggest problem is that my story is too long for the thesis film. The story could be shorter, and the narrative structure could be more straightforward. Frank gave me some suggestions to improve my script. First, I removed three flashback scenes and started my whole story from the beginning, the very beginning in the story time, and the last time Cheng Hao goes to Bo's store, which is after he returns the watch to the elder. Secondly, In the previous part of this story, Cheng Hao confesses that he stole the elder's watch. Frank suggested I let the elder offer

a job for Cheng Hao in the end. Hearing this suggestion, I couldn't agree with this more. If I add this plot to the script, the ending of my story would be meaningful. The elder offering good for evil could form a big contrast between the two characters. This contrast gave my protagonist a feeling of shame, making the story's development smoother. And in the second draft, the major problems are solved. Only some details need to be clear and polished. My story is almost shaped up.

## **Scheduling:**

From my personal experience, arranging the crews you want to work with within the group is the most challenging task in film production. Finding the most appropriate unit in every position and producing the film with the best quality under a limited budget could be challenging for me. But in general, the whole process of making my thesis film was successful and a pleasure.

The whole pre-production lasted for about three weeks, including finding locations, casting, making a schedule, renting equipment, and finding other crew members. During this period, I met my girlfriend, Yutian Guo. Then, in September, I

went to Shenzhen to meet my friend Haochen Zhang, my producer, and some of my crew members. We held some meetings to discuss the shooting locations. She also provided much help for my film.

The first thing I went to Shenzhen for was to find locations. There are four locations in my film, the street, a watch repairing shop, a store, and the home. The most critical place in my film is the store where I have over fifty percent of the story take place. The store in my mind is a small store like this:



But we found that stores like this are too small to shoot. And the decoration in the bigger store looks too nice for the story. My producer and I spent one day driving to the suburb

of Shenzhen. And finally, we found the location near Meisha Beach. In case unexpected things happen, we found two stores there. One is the primary location, and another is the backup location. After dinner with my girlfriend and my producer that night, we started to find the pedestrian bridge. My girlfriend led my producer and me to see some different bridges. And finally, we decided to shoot around a bridge, where my girlfriend shot her film one year ago. After that, we drove to Sheko, looking for some backup locations of the store.

The following location is Chen Hao's home. This location, in my mind, should be a humble room. I opened the Airbnb website and found some good locations, I tried to contact six of the landlords, and one agreed to shoot in his apartment. The landlord is also a good guy.

The last location was a watch repairing shop. At first, I thought this location would be the most challenging place to find or the most expensive one because all the watches or the clocks in the shop are costly. At first, I search for a repairing shop on the Internet. The majority of watch repair shops are in a shopping mall, which would be inconvenient for the shooting. The shop in my mind should be on the first floor, not in a shopping mall; and it should look nice. Under



these requirements, I only found two shops. One of the shops was moved into a building and on the seventh floor, and another was the shop I used. This shop was the only possibility. I went to the shop right after I found it. When I arrived there, like my story, the owner was not there. Then we talked to the employee there. She gave me the owner's phone number and told us to come tomorrow. On the way back to my home, we got in contact with the owner.

On the next day, we came to the repairing shop again to meet the owner. Fortunately for us, the owner was easy-going. We had a long conversation about our crew, the purpose of this film, our demands, and we did an introduction of our teams. The owner was pleased to lend his shop to us. He expressed that he had never seen a film or a TV series whose essential item was a watch. He was interested in my story, and he said he could offer his place for free, which was a happy surprise for me.

After we found all locations, we decided to shoot for four days in four different places. In this way, the schedule could be relatively loose and comfortable, so we arranged everything for four days. The next step was the equipment. After I sent the location pictures to my Director of Photography, Zeyuan

Ma, an experienced photographer, he gave me a list of the camera and lights he wanted to use. He decided to use Red Gemini with Atlas anamorphic lenses. After he gave me the list, we went to the equipment rental shop, then we reserved the equipment and found two gaffers and two grips from the rental shop. Up to now, everything looked right on track.

## **Casting:**

In the beginning, I had no idea how to find actors in mainland China. In my past shooting experiences, I always asked my classmates or friends in the acting department to play a role in my film. But this time, I had to find some professional actors for my movie. At least my protagonist, Cheng Hao, must be played by a professional actor.

The casting time was short for my film. In Rochester, I always put a casting call on the local actor group chat on Facebook, which is the best way to find actors for the students in Rochester because we can find many stage actors with good skills around this city. But the irony was that I didn't even know how to find actors in Shenzhen locally. My producer told me people in mainland China to always make a long and well-

designed poster on social media like WeChat or Weibo to attract actors' attention. But to make such a poster would cost much time. So, I didn't choose to put a sign on social media. I asked my producer to recommend an actor who had collaborated with him before. In the first week, the result was not good. My producer suggested to me some actors, but no one looked right to fit my character. I felt a little nervous. One afternoon, my producer showed me his film shot in the summer of last year. I noticed the leading actor in his movie looked good. So, I asked my producer to introduce his actor to me. Gradually, I felt my pre-production was accelerating.

## **Main Actors:**

### **Huaqi Wang (Cheng Hao)**

My producer sent me a demo reel of an actor and his last film. After I watched these video materials, I felt this actor was a good choice for my movie because his appearance was favorably matched with the character in my mind, and his performance looked good. I asked my producer to keep in touch with him because I wanted to talk with this actor once he

attended my film. The good news was that this actor showed a strong interest in my script. Soon, he told my producer his time was available, and we had an online meeting with him.

During the meeting, we had an online casting session. I asked him to perform the confession scene. The result was not bad.

After that, we had a short chat about other information and finished this casting. I was satisfied with this actor, so I wanted my producer to negotiate the salary with the actor and



confirm with him.

*Cheng Hao is telling Li Bo about his situation.*

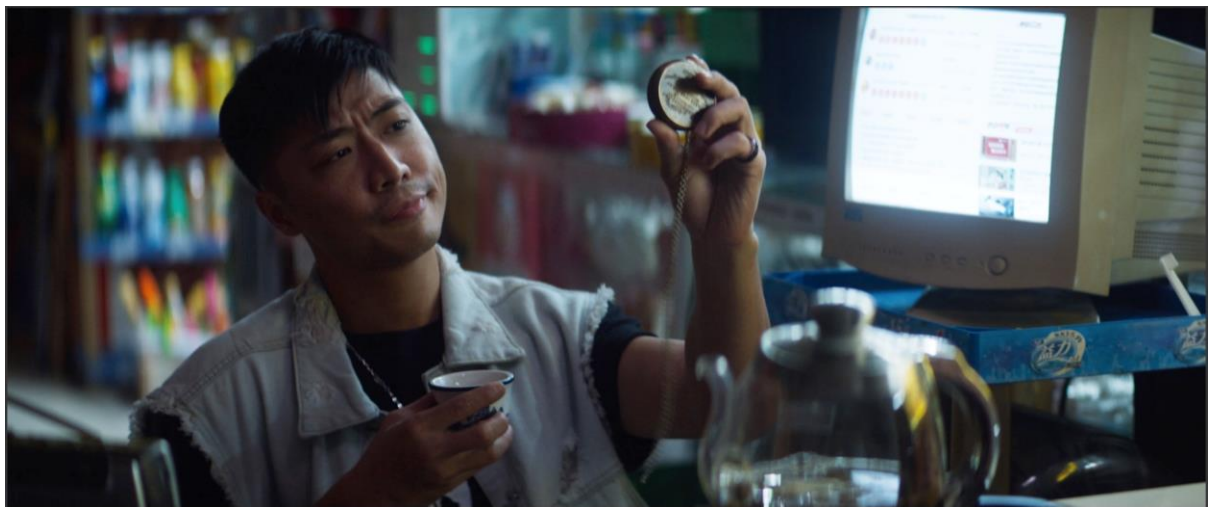
**Xutao Zheng (Li Bo)**

Finding Li Bo's actor was not that smooth. In the very beginning, my producer recommended one of his classmates to play the role of Li Bo, and he sent me a link which was his classmate's film. Seeing his film, I felt that this guy is the best actor for Li Bo.



Unfortunately, he was in Hong Kong at that time. If he came back to mainland China, he must quarantine for two weeks. I wanted him to be in my film, but the quarantine would cost me more than \$600, which is a considerable amount for me. So, I contacted another actor, Xutao, from a local actor group. His Because his appearance and stature matched with Li Bo's

looking in my mind. The only problem was that he was a new actor, he didn't have much acting experience. But considering his salary price was acceptable, and his past work was still of good quality. So, finally, I choose Xutao as my actor. My producer Haochen and I took a video call to talk about the story and his role. He was an earnest man. I noticed that he prepared very well for this short talking. At first, I felt so pity because I couldn't cooperate with my producer's classmate, but after the talking, I think Xutao was qualified for this role.



*Li Bo is examining the watch.*

### **Jia Wei (apprentice)**

Jia Wei is my Art Director's sister, and this was her first time playing a role in a film. I've seen her casting clip. It was pretty good for a non-experienced actress. This character was a supporting role, and she can play this role in

kind, so I chose her to portray the apprentice.



*Apprentice is receiving Cheng Hao*

### **Hong Bi (Elder)**

The last character is the elder. This character is also essential. My producer found a professional actor who has worked in the film and TV industries for over forty years. He said he had a strong interest in my film and wanted to join us. Also, he could provide a lower price than his regular salary. When I saw his information, I recognized him immediately because we could always find him in film and TV series or the advertisement in the subway station. I felt so excited that I can collaborate with such an experienced actor, and that he would play a role in my film was even more unimaginable. With his joining, I felt more confident about my



thesis film. Because of this actor, my budget increased correspondingly, though. But I thought it was worth it for better quality film.



*Hong Bi in the advertisement on subway station wall*





*Elder forgives Cheng Hao's behavior*

## **Character Design:**

I also have some original versions of this story which were not written down but in my mind. In my first version, Li Bo was not a shop owner. He was Cheng Hao's friend. When Cheng Hao finds he is in a time loop, Bo is the only one who believes and helps Cheng Hao. The stolen property disposal guy is another character. And there was a police officer in the original story.

At first, Cheng Hao was an orphan in my story. He got separated from his parents in the railway station when he was young. To make a living, he had to steal something and sell it. The police are responsible for this area where Cheng Hao is living. They know each other very well. After Cheng Hao stole the watch, he met the officer. The officer tells Cheng Hao he made contact with his lost parents. Cheng Hao is expecting to meet them. But he gets trapped in a time loop. So, that would make the size of my story enormous. Therefore, I revised my story a lot to make it something I could shoot.

## **Storyboard/Previsualization:**

To make sure my shooting goes well, I made a specific storyboard of my script. My producer and I even set up a 3D model in Unreal engine. And to shorten the time setting up the camera and lights, we designed the camera's and light's position in the Unreal engine as well. Then, I put them in the script according to the lines.

#### (四)

1、2  
、3

李博的商店，内/外，夜

李博叼着烟坐在柜台后面玩手机。

程浩  
博哥。



李博继续低着头玩手机。

李博  
程浩？你怎么来了。



1A 表 插入

程浩把表放在了柜台上。

李博  
你不是说不干了么。



程浩  
生活所迫，我也不想接着干这个。不过你先看一眼这个表。

李博依旧没抬头在玩手机。

李博  
你等我玩完这把。

4

全景，程浩在小店里溜达。

大约十秒后，李博起身去关门。

两个高中生走了过来，看见他们，李博叫他们离开。

李博  
今天休息了。

学生  
我看里面不是有人...

4



李博  
哎，看什么看啊看看，回家写作业去。

学生

5



6



5、  
6

Storyboards according to the script (1)

2、3、4

一个店员走了过来。

程浩抬头环视四周。

程浩并没有意识到店员在和他说话，仍然在环视四周。

程浩回过神来，然后回答店员的话。

程浩拿起表离开修理店，时不时地回头看看里面。

(七)

李博的商店，内，夜

你好，我来修一下这块表。

店员  
您好，有什么能帮助您的。

程浩  
你能看一下这块表么，不走了。


店员  
不好意思先生，您这块表是一个老式结构的，只有我们店里的老板才能修。

程浩  
啊，哦，那个发条盒坏了是吧。


店员  
是的先生，看来您对表还相当了解。我们店老师傅明天才能回来，请您明天再来一趟吧。

程浩  
啊...行


2




3



4



5



Storyboards according to the script (2)

6



-第二天，程浩在床上睁开了眼睛。

-程浩拿着一个包跑回了家里，他把包放在沙发上。打开包里面有几捆现金。非常开心地把现金跑向空中，这时候门铃响了。

7



8



-程浩打开房门，一把枪指着他的

9

-程浩被按到墙上，手上被上了手铐。

10

警察（声音）  
你被逮捕了。



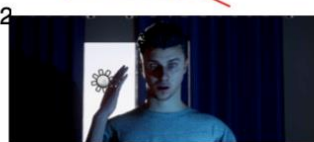
-程浩一次又一次醒来。

-凌晨两点，程浩拿着杯子在屋里走来走去，屋里到处都是空的杯子。程浩准备再喝一口咖啡。

11



12



## (十四)

程浩家，内，日

新的一天，程浩不想起床了，他把头埋在枕头下。几秒钟过后，闹钟又响了。程浩挣扎地爬了起来，看着桌子上的怀表愣了会神。然后他站起来拿走手表离开了房间。

## (十五)

街上，外，日



程浩来到他第一次遇见老人的地方，他站在天桥上等着老人过来。如他所料，老人果然过来了，而且看起来正在找什么东西。程浩走过去并拍了拍他的后背，然后把表交给了他。

程浩

大爷，这是您的表吗？

老人转过身注意到怀表，激动的抓住程浩的手使劲握手。

老人

哎呀，你说昨天那个，真是太感谢了，你在哪找到的。

老人在手里自己检查怀表，然后打开了表盖。

*Storyboards according to the script (3)*

## On the Set:

My DP Zeyuan had done a lot of commercials and short films. We had cooperated several times in the past. Before the shoot, I sent him the script and the Unreal storyboard. After he read them, he told me he understood my idea and had the confidence to make it. I thought everything then was ready to go.

Just one day before we started shooting, my producer made a phone call to the store where we were going to film. But the store owner told us he was not there in the next several days. Because it was the National Holidays at that time, almost everyone was on a break. When I heard this, my heart nearly stopped. Suddenly, I remembered that we had a backup plan. I asked my producer Haochen to call another store owner. After a short conversation, the owner knew our dilemma and was happy to offer his place to us.

My story is a light Sci-fi film. I didn't have any experience with this genre. So, I discussed with my DP Zeyuan about the lighting design. He suggested I darken the background and highlight the protagonists. I listened to his suggestions, I was still not sure how he would set up the

lights. The next day, after we arrived at the location, Zeyuan showed his idea to me. First, he closed all the lights on the location to make the background dark. Then, he pasted some LED tube lights on the ceiling above the two actors and used some black paperboard to block unnecessary light. Those were the key lights. And next, he used the lightbox as the fill light. And the light from the street is the backlight, which built the light in Bo's store.



*Lights setting in Bo's store*

The art team arrived at the site three hours earlier than other crew members to build up the scene. The counter in the story was totally built by my art team. Because this took time on the first day of shooting, and over 40% of the film would be shot there, we were already behind our schedule. We worked overtime for 4 hours. When we finished shooting, it was 6 am the next day.



The task on the second day was not so hard. Because of the location, we didn't need to do any art, and the lights were straightforward to set up. The DP lighted up a 1k2 and 2k Tungsten light outside the window. They were making their lights crossed at two actors. Everything at this location was done.



*Lights setting in repairing shop*

The third-day of shooting was complex. To save the budget, we let the leading actor live in the location where Cheng Hao's home was in the film. The third day's schedule was shooting the outdoor scene in the morning and afternoon and shooting the indoor scene in the evening and night so that the Art Direction can build the indoor scene in the morning and afternoon. We divided crews into two groups. Only necessary crews and actors went to the outdoor location with me. And other crews went to help Art to build the scene.



We didn't choose to set up the light for the outdoor scene because the light in the outdoor scene is strong enough for the film shooting.



*Lights setting on the pedestrian bridge*

After we finished the outdoor scene successfully, we moved to the last location of the film. When we got there, Art Direction already basically finished building and waiting for the next step.

We started our shooting at 6pm. The daylight was still strong at that time. But we were trying to create a morning light. What we did was we set up a 1k tungsten light on the balcony. And we used sheer curtains as diffusion to soften the light, and the light can hide behind the curtain. We also lighted some lamps, TV, the computer screen as the fill lights

and background light.



*Lights setting in Cheng Hao's home*

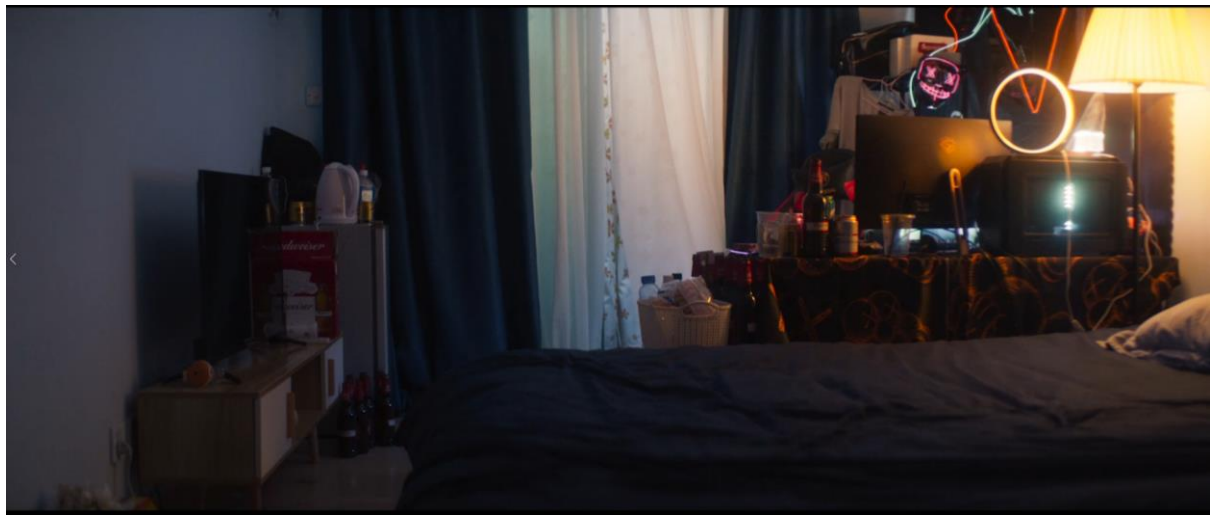
## Production Design:

My Art Director, Siru, sent a file about the costume design. She listed a bunch of choices of costumes and made a PowerPoint presentation.



### *Production Design PowerPoint Slide*

This file gave me a visualized result of the costume design and scene design.



### *Comparison of Cheng Hao's home between before art and after art*

Especially in Cheng Hao's home, she made a splendid design. We can see the whole room was almost totally rebuilt. And the design corresponded with his character in the film.



## Sound:

After I took Dave Sluberski's sound class, I learned about film sound recording and sound design. I know that clear sound is significant in the film. So, I chose to use lavalier microphones to record the lines and use a regular directional microphone to make sure my sound is clear. I told my producer Haochen that I needed a professional sound recorder who can manipulate these two recording systems at the same time. Fortunately, his friend, Yuan Gao, is professional at this position and said he could help us. Before the shoot, we had some short meetings. I expressed my needs, and Yuan said that's not a problem.



## **Directing:**

I took both an acting class and a directing class before I shot my thesis film. I thought I understood how to direct the actors and what is the most efficient way to communicate with actors to convey my ideas to them accurately.

When I was working on the script, I liked to perform the scene by myself at first. Then I transformed the acting into characters. In this way, I can understand my characters and know the actors' feelings. I believe only I totally understand the characters. I can believe them so that my actors can believe the characters and the story through my directing. I tried to direct from the actor's perspective, which was what I learned in acting class.

Before the shoot, I always had a meeting with my actors. I wanted to know how they understood my story and the roles in the story. Based on their understanding, I could give them instructions to match my requirements.

And on the set, I always called my actors by their role's name, giving my actors hints every time to really be immersed

in the story. The reason I did this on the set was based on what I learned in directing class.

## **Editing:**

In general, post-production is the most familiar to me. But when I was editing my own film, I felt it was not that easy. I'm not saying my material was hard to edit. The first version of my thesis film was 30 minutes. Frank Deese told me that it was too long, and I need to shorten it. It was hard to give up the shots and angles when I was shortening the film. I wanted to keep the scenes in my film as much as possible. I tried to shorten some shots. But it was still over 25 minutes. I sent it to all my committee members and waited to get their comments. After four or five versions, I successfully shortened my film to under 20 minutes. The most important comment from my committee was to always keep the story moving on and only keep the valuable plot. Because my story is a time loop story, there are many similar shots and actions. Some of them are almost the same. So, I deleted some repeating unimportant plots. At first, I thought that might influence

the story development, but the result made the film shorter and the shots more compact.

## Coloring:

After I took Don's digital color correction class, I got a better understanding of color both in theory and technique aspect. To get the most accurate color, I chose the Red Gemini to shoot the film. Seeing the raw material, my colorist, Yaodong, and I had a discussion. At last, we selected the Aces workflow on the color grading to restore the best color. Besides the color restoration, I also wanted to create some atmosphere through color. So, I asked Yaodong to add some blue in Bo's store and Cheng Hao's home.



*The visual style in Bo's store*



*The visual style in Cheng Hao's home*

I wanted blue added in these two scenes because I believe the blue color can enhance the mysterious and guilty feeling of Cheng Hao. I wanted to emphasize these feelings. In other scenes, I chose to use the original color.

## **Screening at RIT:**

I have to say. This was an unforgettable experience in my life. I went back to China to shoot this film and almost did everything without RIT-SOFA's help. Before I arrived in America, I even didn't know if I could attend the screenings due to COVID. Fortunately, everything went well. Because we were screening online, and everyone was looking at it on their own computers, I was worried about how it would be received. Is the color correct on the YouTube stream? How's the sound



level on the YouTube stream? Will audiences like this all-Chinese film?

But after the film was over, I heard tons of congrats and commendations. I never expected my film could be so successful as this. Even now, I still remembered the feeling at that time. I can say that was the first time I received so many congrats and commendations in my life. Some audience members even said they felt like they were watching a Netflix film. At that moment, I felt all my effort had paid back.

Few days after the screening, my advisor Frank Deese told me that the college selected this thesis film for the 2021 honor show, which surprised me because I had never expected I could get this honor. That title looked like an unreachable star for me before I get it. However, at this time, I won this name for a certainty. I felt that the audiences, the School of Animation and Film, admitted my three-years efforts. This honor was a big surprise for me at the end of my school life.

## **Ending:**

My thesis film "1:38" means a lot to me; it started with the difficult time of COVID-19 and ended with it. The process of making this film was an unforgettable experience for me. I

crossed half the Earth to shoot this film. I paid a lot of effort, time, and money to build my dream project as a student. I'm not a new filmmaker when it comes to technique. But I am a new filmmaker when it comes to the creative aspects of filmmaking. As a pure science and engineering student for the past twenty-two years, I'm proud of myself that I can tell such a good story. But I know this can't be my final destination, even if I'm going to graduate this summer. I still have so many things to learn.

This is a new beginning in my life and my filmmaking journey. I'm glad to come to RIT and to SOFA, and to know the students and all the faculty here. These three years at RIT will be a treasure my whole life.